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AUTHOR Batey, Anne; Ricketts, Dick
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ABSTRACT

Intended to help educators choose the most appropriate word processing products for elementary school writing instruction, this report provides extensive information on 12 word processor and 13 writing activity software products. A list of components, general descriptions, comments and evaluations are included for each product. The products described are as follows: (1) Bank Street Writer III (Activity Files, volumes 1 and 2); (2) Bard's "Pro-Am" Writing System; (3) "FrEdWriter" (with FrEd lessons); (4) "HomeWord Plus"; (5) LogoWriter; (6) "Magic Slate," (I Can Write! Be a Writer! and Write with Me!); (7) MasterType's Writer; (8) MECC Writer (Ghost Writer, MECC Speller, and MECC Write Start); (9) Milliken Word Processor, (Prewriting, Postwriting and Writing Workshop Activity Files; (10) SchoolWriter; (11) Snoopy Writer; and (12) The Writer's Assistant (Interactive Writing Tools). Producer information is included with each description and listed again at the end of the report. (JD)

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THE Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

PRODUCT DESCRIPTIONS; WORD PROCESSORS AND WRITING ACTIVITIES FOR THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

A MicroSIFT Quarterly Report

February 1987

by

Anne Batey
Dick Ricketts

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Technology Program

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

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BANK STREET WRITER III

Producer: Scholastic, Inc.
Type: word processor
Price: 79.95 (AP), 99.95 (IB)
Lab Packs: 129.95/5 copies

Copyright: 1986
Grade Level: 2-12
Hardware: AP, IB

Components: Double-sided program disk for the 40- and 80-column version with tutorial and backup, double-sided program disk for 20-column version with tutorial and backup, double-sided dictionary disk and backup, reference guide for teachers, student guide, set of 14 writing process activities, supplementary set of 21 brief composition exercises.

Description: This enhanced version of the earlier Bank Street Writer versions contains all the features most teachers and students need while remaining easy to learn and use. It now includes a choice of 20-, 40- or 80-column display, a fully integrated 60,000-word spelling checker, an on-line thesaurus with a 50,000-word dictionary, a calculator and an option for the teacher to create frozen writing prompts which students cannot write over. The expanded teacher utilities include chain printing, programmable function keys (macros), print-to-disk and print-to-screen features. The 20-column version is on a separate disk from the 40- and 80-column version; both program disks contain a tutorial introduction.

When using the thesaurus or spelling checker, the questionable word in the document can be automatically replaced with a suggested word. Individual words can be checked as you compose or the whole document checked once it's completed. Additional words can be added to both dictionaries. Users can create up to twenty "macros" which enables two keystrokes to do the work of several. The frozen text feature allows teachers to create on-screen lessons, quizzes or guided student writing.

Comments:

- This newest version is loaded with useful features but is not overwhelming. It looks and acts like the earlier BSW versions (original and BSW II) and new features are accessible when one is ready for them. The earlier versions are still available.
- Some features are not available in the 20-column version: spelling checker, thesaurus, mouse, frozen text and macros.
- A good word processor for serious work yet easy to learn and use.
- The spelling checker is also available separately as Bank Street Speller. It is compatible with both the original version and Bank Street Writer II. It costs \$64.95.

Evaluation:

Note: There are numerous favorable reviews of prior versions of Bank Street Writer.

1. Excellent. Features are now easier to perform and new advanced features add a tremendous amount of power. Electronic Learning, January 1987, p. 30.

ACTIVITY FILES FOR THE BANK STREET WRITER: VOLUME 1

Producer: Scholastic, Inc.
Type: writing activities
Price: 59.95
Lab Packs: 89.95/5 copies

Copyright: 1984
Grade Level: 6-8
Hardware: AP IB CO AT

Components: 130-page teacher's manual, three copies of the program disk.

Description: These activities are based on the process approach to writing and focus on prewriting, composing, revising and publishing while using Bank Street Writer. Each activity emphasizes a language arts objective as well as mastery of a Bank Street Writer feature.

In general, activities include a file of on-screen prompts asking students to think, write, revise, etc. Most activities present an individual challenge (try to change a passage from first to third person in a minimum number of steps), but many activities require a partner (react to another student's writing).

Evaluation:

1. Highly recommended. Intriguing prewriting activities will fire the imaginations of students. Program leads naturally to peer collaboration. Curriculum Review, May/June 1986, p. 36.
2. Desirable. Creative, open-ended activities encourage students to use problem-solving skills. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts, California Department of Education. 1986.
3. Highly recommended. Interesting and creative methods are used to teach word processing skills. MicroSIFT. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, January 1987.

ACTIVITY FILES FOR THE BANK STREET WRITER: VOLUME 2

Producer: Scholastic, Inc.
Type: writing activities
Price: 89.95
Lab Packs: 89.95/5 copies

Copyright: 1984
Grade Level: 4-6
Hardware: AP IB CO AT

Components: 96-page teacher's handbook, three copies of the program disk.

Description: This collection of 40 prepared lessons of 3-5 activities each explores different forms of writing (narrative, descriptive, expository, etc.) by focusing on specific writing skills (explain a process, write sequential directions, describe actions, etc.). In each activity, on-screen prompts direct students either to think about something and then write, or to read, write or revise a passage. The backside of the program disk contains an item bank of all objectives and activities used in the lessons. The item bank can be used to build custom lessons for individual students.

Evaluation:

1. Desirable. Activities serve as motivators to write, proofread, and edit. Documentation is extensive. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts. California Department of Education, 1986.
2. Highly recommended. Objectives are clearly stated in the item skills bank. When designing new lessons, the database matches specific goals with item numbers (activities). MicroSIFT. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, January 1987.

BARD'S "PRO-AM" WRITING SYSTEM

Producer: Writing Software International

Copyright: 1985

Type: word processor

Price: 69.95

Lab Packs: 259.00/10 copies

Grade Level: 3-12

Hardware: AP

Components: Three double-sided disks containing the starter and experienced level word processors, a tutorial, a work disk, 40- and 80-column versions of the professional level word processors and spelling dictionary, 47-page user's manual.

Description: This system provides three separate word processors of different levels of sophistication. The lower levels, Starter and Experienced, have fewer features and are primarily menu driven. For example, the starter level supports basic text entry (40-column), editing and printing without block operations or search and replace. An integrated spelling checker can be used with the upper two levels. The highest level is command driven (with help screens) and includes a quick insert feature that allows you to create "macros" or a set of commonly used phrases that are instantly inserted with a couple of keystrokes. On-screen help is just an ESC key away. A tutorial for beginners is provided on the backside of one disk.

This is a very straightforward word processor with a lot of useful features for the classroom including a spelling checker that provides correction options once questionable words are identified. There are choices for type size (40- and 80-column), easy access to help and a reasonable price. The 50,000-word spelling corrector is quickly accessible (requires switching to the dictionary disk), identifies alternative spellings and will replace misspelled words in the document. The quick insert feature is also very easy to use.

Comments:

- This is a very well-designed word processor--easy to use and grow with.
- A full-featured package for the price.

Evaluation:

1. Excellent. Easy for the beginner yet appealing to the frequent user. Region X Software Consortium. May 1986.

FREDWRITER

Producer: Steele Publishing
Type: word processor
Price: 40.00 with lesson set
Lab Packs: Unlimited copying

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 3-12
Hardware: AP

Components: Five double-sided disks containing the main program, FrEd Tips, Frilless FrEd, seven lessons. (All documentation is on disk and must be printed.)

Description: This word processor has the customary set of features for entering, revising and printing text but is a standout because of its price. Educators are free to make copies and distribute to students. Features that make it a useful school product include help screens that list all commands and then describe the operation of each; 40- or 80-column display options; frozen prompts that can be inserted in files to give guided writing instructions to students. The package includes a set of Writing Lesson disks created by educators and a FrEdWriter Tips disks of useful, advanced information. The package contains complete documentation on disk ready to be printed out.

Considering price and quality, FrEdWriter is impressive. It is friendly and has a full set of file management features and printer controls. Menus make it easy to jump from one activity to another, e.g., format a new disk before saving a file.

Comments:

- Once past the opening menu, all word processor functions are performed by commands and while on-screen help is readily available, teachers will need to provide a lot of support until commands are mastered.

Evaluations:

1. Desirable. Excellent and comprehensive support materials including tests, sample lessons and suggestions for adapting the lessons. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts. California Department of Education, 1986.
2. Excellent. Has all the basic features students will ever need and is relatively easy to use. Electronic Learning, January 1987, p. 30.

FREDLESSONS

Producer: Steele Publishing

System: FrEdWriter

Type: writing activities

Price: \$40.00 (comes with FrEdWriter)

Lab Pack: Unlimited copying

Copyright: 1986

Grade Level: 3-12

Hardware: AP

Description: The FrEdWriter package includes FrEdLessons which are eight complete lesson plans and files of prompted writing. Since the lessons were created by teachers, they have been classroom tested and perfected. Each lesson is structured around a popular piece of children's literature and incorporates the concepts of the National Writing Project. Four of the eight lessons are designed for elementary students in grades 3-6. The lesson descriptions are very detailed and include offline as well as FrEdWriter activities. The teacher's guide for each lesson is in FrEdWriter documents that must be printed. Handouts and instruction sheets are also on disk.

Comments:

- The lessons are remarkably detailed; this makes modification easy because the original lesson is so carefully spelled out.

HOMESWORD PLUS

Producer: Sierra-On Line

Copyright: 1985

Type: word processor

Grade Level: 3-12

Price: 69.95

Hardware: AP

Lab Packs: additional copies \$10.00/each

Components: Double-sided program disk, spelling disk, 122-page user's guide.

Description: This word processor features icons for identifying and selecting functions. As students become familiar with the program, command codes using the open Apple keys can be used. The type size can be 40- or 80-column. The spelling checker only identifies and underlines suspected misspellings (those not found in the 30,000-word dictionary). Students must return to the document and correct the marked words. Some additional features are options for automatic backups, file merging, file linking when printing, a typewriter mode for printing as keys are pressed, on-screen format of document layout and automatic point headers for outline indents.

Comments:

- This program is a little clumsy in operation, but it has a full complement of features including advanced layout options such as automatic point headers and indents for outlines.
- The spelling checker is a little disappointing in that suggested correct spellings are not displayed once misspellings are identified--this is not a spelling corrector. A 30,000-word dictionary is pretty small for advanced students' vocabulary level. While words can be added to a special file, this requires some extra manipulation beyond what the menu supports.
- The earlier version, Homeword, was marketed in a school edition and included a special Teacher's Manual. This version is no longer available.

LOGOWRITER

Producer: Logo Computer Systems, Inc.
Type: word processing
Price: 450.00
Lab Packs: cost includes site license

Copyright: 1986
Grade Level: 3-8
Hardware: AP CO IB

Components: One copyable double-sided disk, 112-page teacher's manual, reference guide, six student workbooklets, six sets of 10 or more student activity cards, posters, keyboard stickers.

Description: LogoWriter combines word processing with the Logo programming environment. Students can work with text, graphics, animation and sound. Using a project approach, LogoWriter provides a large sequence of interdisciplinary activities so that students learn LogoWriter by doing and experimenting. Students can create illustrated cards, branching stories, animated puns or interactive stories while learning Logo, LogoWriter and other content skills.

LogoWriter is sold as a site-licensed kit; the purchaser is free to make copies for the classrooms at the site. For an additional \$150, schools may make copies for students to take home.

Comments:

- As a word processor alone, it is not suitable for doing extended written work even though more elaborate word processing commands can be constructed using Logo procedures. Nevertheless, "By changing their word processor [elementary students] gain the sense of control over the computer that lies at the heart of the Logo philosophy. It is anti-educational to give children software tools as 'black boxes.' They cannot understand change." (Seymour Papert, Classroom Computer Learning, April 1986, p. 40)
- For teachers who are excited by and comfortable with the Logo environment, LogoWriter has wonderful possibilities.
- The booklet activities are interdisciplinary and have application in areas other than language arts or math/programming.

Evaluation:

1. Overall Rating A-. Program is easily used by young students and fully utilizes the computer's capabilities. The accompanying materials offer a comprehensive curriculum with ideas for integration into many subject areas. Educational Software Reports/Electronic Learning, October 1986, p. 2.

MAGIC SLATE

Producer: Sunburst
Type: word processor
Price: 99.95
Lab Packs: \$299.85/10 copies

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 2-12
Hardware: AP

Components: 20/40-column program disk and backup, 80-column program disk and backup, Magic Slate Handbook (a self-teaching tutorial on paper for teachers and students), two sets of activities for primary and intermediate grades, reproducible student workbook, teaching guide.

Description: The first word processor to "grow with you," Magic Slate provides a 20-column version with large letters for primary students, a 40-column version for intermediate students, and a full-featured 80-column version for more advanced students. The three versions use icons and share common commands, so switching to another version is easy. Comprehensive support materials include teaching ideas for several grade levels and reproducible activity pages.

All three versions provide a choice of type styles which are displayed as you enter them. Switching typesyles requires only a Control key command to get to a menu of typesyles. In 20- and 40-column format, screen display shows the typesyle as it actually will appear when printed.

Comments:

- One of the easiest to get familiar with--very user friendly. Performing the block operations (copy and move blocks of text) is a little awkward.
- Typesyles include superscripts and subscripts which are not common word processing options to see on screen. This might be of use in math (powers of ten) and science (chemical formulas) activities using word processing. Additional typesyles are available in Magic Slate Typesyles from Sunburst (\$49).
- Large text from the 20-column version can be used to make quick transparencies.

Evaluation:

1. Highly Recommended. Three versions make it an extremely flexible tool. Printing documents that take full advantage of the fancy printing features can be tricky without a more common printer and card. Electronic Learning, January 1985, p. 4.
2. Recommended. The sequential development of word processing skills and needs has been well thought out. Evaluations: Microware. Provincial Educational Media Centre, British Columbia, October 1985, v.4, n.4.

3. Favorably reviewed. An economical word processor with enough powerful features to make it an attractive choice for use in many situations. Educational Technology, October 1985, p. 52.
4. Exemplary. A wonderful, easy, versatile word processor which can be used effectively by all levels, primary to adult. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts. California Department of Education, 1986.
5. Excellent. Easy for a novice to begin writing with and to learn the more sophisticated features later. Electronic Learning, January 1987, p. 30.

I CAN WRITE!

Producer: Sunburst
Type: writing activities
Price: 40.00
Lab Packs: copy a classroom set

Copyright: 1986
Grade Level: 2
Hardware: AP

Components: Program disk and backup, 126-page teacher's guide.

Description: This collection of 25 language arts activities introduces grade two writing objectives and the basic word processing features of Magic Slate. Using the 20-column version of Magic Slate, students work with nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs as they develop proper sentence patterns and explore different styles of writing. Each lesson results in a printed page that students add to their I Can Write! book. Each student works with his or her own copy of the I Can Write! disk.

Comments:

- Teachers can modify the pages to personalize and individualize the book even further.
- Second grade students will need some prior keyboarding instruction to make these activities effective. Some lessons involve learning the keyboard as well as a writing skill.
- Teacher's manual is extremely comprehensive. A quick reference card or planning sheet would help give a "big picture" to the sequence of activities.

Evaluation:

1. Recommended. The page templates make it fun and easy for a child to end up with a personal book. MicroSIFT. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, January 1987.

BE A WRITER!

Producer: Sunburst

Type: writing activities

Price: 40.00

Lab Packs: copy a classroom set

Copyright: 1986

Grade Level: 3

Hardware: AP

Components: Program disk and backup, 128-page teacher's guide.

Description: This collection of 25 language arts activities introduces grade three writing objectives and the basic word processing features of Magic Slate (20-column version). Students work with imaginary characters--Ruby Robot, Giant George, and others--while they develop skills with word order, punctuation, complete sentences, combining sentences and various writing styles. Each lesson results in a printed page that students add to their Be a Writer! book. Each student works with his or her own copy of the Be a Writer! disk.

Comments:

- This can be a starting package or used as a continuation of I Can Write! skills.
- Very comprehensive teacher's manual but it lacks a general outline or overview for planning purposes.
- After initial help students could work independently with the sequence of activities.

Evaluation:

1. Recommended. Third graders should find it really fun and rewarding to create a personalized book. MicroSIFT. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, January 1987.

WRITE WITH ME!

Producer: Sunburst
Type: writing activities
Price: 59.00
Lab Packs: 177.00/10 disks

Copyright: 1986
Grade Level: 4
Hardware: AP

Components: Program disk and backup, 167-page teacher's guide.

Description: This collection of 25 language arts activities introduces and develops language arts skills and the word processing features of Magic Slate (40-column version) while creating a complete story. Each lesson results in a chapter for a story called "Journey to the Thunderbird." An element of story writing is explored in each lesson: character and setting description, use of dialogue, use of similes (comparisons), use of conflict (good and evil), introduction of unexpected events and challenges, character motivation and so forth. Grammatical structures are introduced as well: Distinguish between subject and predicate pronouns, connecting words and compound sentences, use of adverbs to expand the action of a verb, noun phrases, etc.

While there is a basic storyline to follow, each student creates her or his own version. The entire sequence of lessons becomes a long-term writing project possibly lasting a whole school year. Each student works with her or his own copy of a Write With Me! disk.

Comments:

- Student creativity may be slightly restricted in cases where specific examples are given and student is asked to replace them.
- Fantasy/Adventure storyline may not appeal to both sexes or different personality types.

Evaluation:

1. Recommended. Could be used to create a classroom book as well as individual books for each classroom member. MicroSIFT. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, January 1987.

MASTERTYPE'S WRITER

Producer: D.C.Heath
Type: word processor
Price: 90.00
Lab Packs: 360.00/10 copies

Copyright: 1986
Grade Level: 1-12
Hardware: AP CO

Components: Two program disks, one tutorial disk, 53-page teacher's guide.

Description: This word processor has the usual set of basic features for text entry, revision, saving and printing. It also has several unusual features including color highlighting, dual writing windows, macros, typeface editing, sorting of lists within a document.

Color is used to highlight text for visual distinction on the screen, indicating text that can be temporarily hidden from view, not printed or for special treatment when printed (underlined or boldface). There are two adjustable writing windows available, each functioning independently from the other. Up to 20 different "macros" can be created to perform sets of keystrokes within a single document. There are seven typeface options and new ones can be designed. The typeface options include animals and very large text, which may appeal to younger students. The sorting tool is useful for organizing lists of words, numbers or phrases. For example, students can number their notes when reviewing them and then use the sort feature to rearrange them in the numbered sequence. The teacher's guide includes eight teaching units which introduce and develop skills with the special features discussed above.

Comments:

- This word processor has a lot of powerful features, especially for on-screen work. It is fun to use in that it encourages experimentation.
- Wide selection of type sizes and styles is interesting and unique among word processors.
- Other than extra steps when moving blocks of text, the program operation is straightforward and logical.
- While it does not have "frozen text" for teachers to create prompted writing activities, color highlighting and filtering can be used to accomplish the same effect.

Evaluation:

1. Favorably reviewed. For teachers looking for ways to further assist their students in improving their organizing, thinking and writing skills, examine the special features of MasterType's Writer. The Computing Teacher, April 1986, p. 51.
2. Very good. Outstanding features are windows, macros, color highlighting and ability to sort text. Electronic Learning, January 1987, p. 30.

MECC WRITER

Producer: MECC
Type: word processor
Price: 49.00
Lab Packs: 269.00/10 copies

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 6-12
Hardware: AP

Components: Program disk and backup, 31-page manual.

Description: This is a straightforward, no-frills word processor with the basic features of easy cursor control, deleting and retrieving text, and saving, loading and printing files. It is easy to learn and use with the help from an on-screen "getting started" tutorial and help screens. It provides only 80-column format and formats text on screen exactly as it will print. Commands use the Control key and a single mnemonic key.

Manual includes sections for introducing students to the basic commands and procedures in a tutorial format.

MECC Writer is part of a series of composing tools from MECC. Other tools in the series included in this report are MECC Speller, Ghost Writer and MECC Write Start.

Comments:

- A somewhat limited but clean word processor in that it does basic things neatly and efficiently but lacks fancy features.
- Blocks of text can be moved but not copied. Places a merged file only in front of the existing file.

Evaluation:

1. Desirable. Students need to learn a minimum of commands and features to use this word processor. The documentation is clear and concise. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts. California Department of Education, 1986.
2. Strongly recommended. A "first" word processing program for teachers and students. Media & Methods, Sept/Oct 1986, p. 58.
3. Grade B-. Help screens make the program easy to learn. Software Reports. Trade Service Publications, Inc., Fall 1986.

GHOST WRITER

Producer: MECC
System: MECC Writer
Type: revising
Price: 89.00
Lab Packs: 314.00/10 copies

Copyright: 1986
Grade Level: 6-12
Hardware: AP

Components: Double-sided disk program disk and backup, 32-page user's manual.

Description: Ghost Writer checks written passages for readability, sentence length, paragraph outline, homonym use, clarity (prepositions, passive voice and conjunctions) and vocabulary (frequency of each word). It can read files created with several different word processors including MECC Writer, Apple Writer II, Bank Street Writer, Writing Workshop Magic Window II, PIE Writer, Appleworks, Magic Slate 80, FrEdWriter.

The program does not allow students to make changes in the document so students must have a paper version of the file in hand. Suggestions are very general and superficial, but good for a preliminary look at style and mechanics. Readability score is based on paragraphs which are identified by a carriage return. Headers and titles are considered a paragraph and will change a readability score.

Comments:

- o Results are all based on strict counts and context is not factored into an analysis. Hence, there is a certain degree of inaccuracy from too much generalization.

Evaluation:

1. Favorably reviewed. A quick, uncluttered and valuable guide for revision; it gives students useful feedback. The Computing Teacher, November 1986, p. 39.

MECC SPELLER

Producer: MECC
Type: spelling checker
Price: 39.00
Lab Packs: 264.00/10 copies

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 6-10
Hardware: AP

Components: Double-sided program disk and backup, 37-page manual

Description: This spelling checker identifies words not found in the main 10,000-word dictionary or the supplementary dictionary of 100 added words. It will check MECC Writer and AppleWriter II files. The program identifies instances of words typed twice in a row--a common typographical error. It also prompts students with words that are potentially confusing because they look similar (desert, dessert) or they sound alike (die, dye). The teacher can add a glossary of 100 "flag words" or words that include brief comments such as definitions or spelling hints.

Corrections cannot be made as file is checked; results are shown on a marked printout of the file. Students must use find and replace feature of the word processor to make corrections. If results are displayed on the screen instead of printed, the words are identified but not in context--not a recommended method for proofreading.

Comments:

- If a word is repeatedly misspelled, it will be identified each time.
- Documents under five pages are manageable during a class period; longer documents may need to be divided into smaller sections for proofreading.

MECC WRITE START

Producer: MECC
Type: writing activities
Price: 39.00
Lab Packs: 89.00/5 copies

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 6-10
Hardware: AP

Components: Program disk and backup, 52-page manual.

Description: This collection of ten activities uses a built-in version of MECC Writer--the word processor. Five of the activities involve sharing written work with other students, e.g., a class journal for brainstorming, a browsing library of favorite quotes, personal insights, song lyrics, etc., or story starters for cooperative stories. The remaining five activities involve experimenting with language, e.g., stream of consciousness writing, expanding descriptive sentences, creating word pictures and writing formula poetry. All student work can be saved on disk or printed.

Comments:

- o Because the activities encourage students to write cooperatively, it provides a large number of opportunities for interaction among students in a class or several classes.
- o Once the program is introduced and students know the basics of MECC Writer, students can use it independently.

Evaluation:

1. Desirable. This effective program generates creative ideas and a wide variety of student responses. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts. California Department of Education, 1986.
2. Highly recommended. Well-structured with opportunities for creative interaction over time. Good alternative to class journal writing. MicroSIFT. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, January 1987.

MILLIKEN WORD PROCESSOR

Producer: Milliken Publishing
Type: word processor
Price: 70.00
Lab Packs: 75.00/5 additional copies

Copyright: 1984
Grade Level: 1-12
Hardware: AP IB

Components: Two program disks, one backup, 20-page manual, 20 reproducible student activities with teacher's guide.

Description: This word processor has basic word processing features for text entry and revision including block delete and move (but not copy) and find. The use of graphics and very simple words to describe processes makes this an appealing choice for young writers. For example, all file handling is done at a File Cabinet shown on the screen, so students Get Files or Throw Away Files instead of loading or deleting them. The writing area, called the "paper," is outlined to separate the help prompts from a student's text. The program disk includes an on-screen tutorial that introduces the four utility components: Help Manual (the on-screen tutorial), Writing Tools (the word processor), File Cabinet (the file load and save utility) and Typewriter (the print utility). Text can be displayed in 40- or 80-column format.

The Milliken Word Processor is part of collection called The Writing Workshop. The other modules, Prewriting and Postwriting, are also described in this report.

Comments:

- Nice at the beginning, but heavy dependency on menus gets irritating and too time-consuming after a while.
- Program lacks some of the conveniences that users are growing accustomed to, e.g., file names have to be typed in instead of highlighted to load.
- Nice, clear, easy-to-follow screens and menus.
- Student activities follow the National Writing Project model of process writing. These activities have to be typed in to a file if they will be completed using the word processor.

Evaluation:

1. Excellent. The screen display makes this program the easiest for young children to read and write from. Does not leave room for sophisticated word processing features. Electronic Learning, October 1984, p. 61.
2. Desirable. With fewer functions than a professional word processor, it is easier for children to learn. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts. California Department of Education, 1986.
3. Favorable Review. An excellent word processor for first-time users. Curriculum Review, Jan/Feb 1985, p. 44.

PREWRITING

Producer: Milliken Publishing
Type: writing activities
Price: 195.00
Lab Packs: 75.00/5 additional copies

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 3-10
Hardware: AP IB

Components: Three different program disks with backups, 16-page manual, 22 reproducible student activities with teacher's guide.

Description: This package includes three unique prewriting units each on a separate disk: "Brainstorming," "Nutshelling" and "Branching." Brainstorming has students free associate up to 24 words or phrases on a topic. The list of words is then organized into groups with a name. Branching has students specify four ideas and then list up to six words or phrases that hint at details related to the main topic. In Nutshelling, students select one of five types of writing (explanation, persuasion, description, short story, letter) and complete several sentences that prompt students to think about the proposed written piece. The sentences are related to the type of proposed writing (I will explain..., I will end by saying..., etc.).

Each activity results in a set of guiding notes that are saved for later expansion with the Milliken Word Processor. Documentation is very thorough and well laid-out; it includes 22 additional prewriting activities which can be entered into a file and completed using Milliken Word Processor (designed for grades 6-10).

Comments:

- Rather expensive for three good (but not great) activities.
- Moving between the activities requires rebooting; there is no convenient main menu which might also check if previous work had been saved.
- Restrictions on word list size and length might be limiting to creative, expressive students.

Evaluation:

1. Recommended with reservations. A convenience to students who are already able to do prewriting tasks but want structure and ability to transfer to a word processor. Curriculum Review, May/June 1985, p. 35.
2. Desirable. Well-designed, easy to use. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts. California Department of Education, 1986.

POSTWRITING

Producer: Milliken Publishing
Type: revising
Price: 225.00
Lab Packs: 75.00/5 additional copies

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 3-10
Hardware: AP IB

Components: Six program disks, five backups, The Writing Workshop handbook, 20 student activities, teacher's guide.

Description: Postwriting includes three different programs to help in the revision process: a spelling checker, a mechanics checker and a proofreader. The spelling checker compares each word in a document against a 41,000-word dictionary. Potential misspellings are highlighted and can be edited or replaced with the correct word from a list of suggested spellings. The mechanics checker identifies "tired" words (overused), "tricky" words (homophones), trivial typing errors (no period, comma or capital letters), pronoun case and sentence fragments. The proofreader guides the student to think carefully about each sentence using a set of leading questions for each reading.

Comments:

- Each of the programs requires quitting and rebooting the next revision task and then reloading the document. This seems unnecessarily tedious.

WRITING WORKSHOP: ACTIVITY FILES

Producer: Milliken Publishing

Copyright: 1986

Type: writing activities

Grade Level: 3-10

Price: 100.00

Hardware: AP IB

Lab Packs: 75.00/5 additional copies

Components: Ten activity disks (six beginner, two intermediate, two advanced), 56-page manual.

Description: This set of disks contains 100 ready-to-use writing activities divided into three skill levels (primary, intermediate, and advanced). (The skill levels do not necessarily correlate with age or grade level.) Each disk includes editing, proofreading, brainstorming, creative writing and guided writing activities. Students first load the Milliken Word Processor, and then select activity files from these disks. Teachers can modify the activities or use the index of topics to mix and match activities for a particular lesson.

Comments:

- Lessons can be printed; for some activities paper and pencil is more appropriate because they do not really require word processing.
- Prompts are not excluded from printouts, so final product is more a worksheet than a personal composition.
- Two typos were found on two different primary disks.
- Teacher's guide is rather bare bones.

SCHOOLWRITER

Producer: SRA
Type: Word Processor
Price: 79.95
Lab Packs:

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 4-8
Hardware: AP

Components: Program disk and backup, activity files disk, 96-page teacher's manual, 56-page student workbook.

Description: This is an 80-column word processor designed to contain only those functions most frequently needed by students. A streamlined menu and single keystroke operation make it easy to learn and use. All formatting is shown on-screen. Ten student lessons teach and practice word processing features. A student workbook includes extra activities. (From publisher's description.)

Comments:

- Distribution rights for SchoolWriter have just changed hands and a review copy was unavailable at the time this report was prepared.

SNOOPY WRITER

Producer: Random House
Type: word processor
Price: 39.95
Lab Packs:

Copyright: 1985
Grade Level: 1-6
Hardware: AP CO

Components: Double-sided program disk, 16-page user's guide.

Description: This is a very simple word processor supporting only text entry, delete, insert and printing. There are no block operations or find and replace features. The program includes a unique story starter feature which has students choose one of four pictures each with a couple of sentences to lead them into writing a story.

Comments:

- Might be motivating to reluctant writers.

THE WRITER'S ASSISTANT

Producer: Encyclopaedia Britannica
Type: word processor
Price: 59.95
Lab Packs:

Copyright: 1984
Grade Level: 4-12
Hardware: AP

Components: Program disk, 64-page user's guide with teachers' suggestions. (This word processor is provided in the collection called Interactive Writing Tools, featured in this report.)

Description: This word processor provides most of the basic functions but uses nonstandard approaches in several instances. For example, pressing the delete key causes a character to disappear, but a control key command is necessary to make the deletion permanent. Otherwise, all the deleted characters reappear. Functions such as find and replace require first going to a menu.

There are three experience level options: Novice, Intermediate, and Expert. The lower levels have fewer commands and menus available. There is a spelling checker which is based on a very small word list (which can be expanded). Words can include one-line definitions to help with context and potentially confusing words.

Comments:

- This word processor is difficult to learn and to move from function to function in.
- This word processor is available separately from Interlearn, Inc., PO Box 342, Cardiff, CA 92007, 619/481-4676.

Evaluation:

1. Desirable. The screens are effective in providing help. Young students will need teacher assistance to learn how to use. Technology in Curriculum--Language Arts. California Department of Education, 1986.

INTERACTIVE WRITING TOOLS

Producer: Encyclopaedia Britannica

System: Writer's Assistant, The

Type: writing activities

Price: 279.00/lesson disks

Lab Packs: 558.00/copies

Copyright: 1986

Grade Level: 3-9

Hardware: AP

Components: Word processing program disk and manual, six lesson disks, 40-page manual.

Description: Six lesson disks focus on a different writing topic: Narrative writing, Expository writing, Poetry, Business Letter writing, Friendly Letter writing and News writing. Each lesson has four levels of "dynamic support" which vary the extent of prompting as a student writes: at level one, students select already written sentences; at level two, they fill in blanks to complete sentences; at level three, they complete paragraphs following a prompted topic sentence; at level four, they complete an assigned writing task. Each lesson produces a file which can be revised and printed using the word processor--The Writer's Assistant.

Comments:

- While the prompted writing activities are nicely done, the word processor is so obscure that the usefulness of the entire package is questionable. The authors intended the system for upper elementary through middle school, but younger students will have a lot of difficulty with the program without considerable teacher involvement.

Evaluation:

1. Recommended. Shows a great deal of carryover to future writing. Sample written pieces and the prompts are quite good. Revision process is rather complex for elementary students. MicroSIFT. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, January 1987.

PRODUCER INFORMATION

D.C.Heath Software
125 Spring Street
Lexington, MA 02173
800/225-1149

Encyclopaedia Britannica
425 North Michigan Avenue
10th Floor
Chicago, IL 60611
800/621-3900

Logo Computer Systems
555 West 57th Street
Suite 1236
New York, NY 10019
800/34LOGIC

Minnesota Educational Computing
Corporation (MECC)
3490 Lexington Avenue North
St. Paul, MN 55126
612/481-3500

Milliken Publishing
1100 Research Blvd.
PO Box 21579
St. Louis, MO 63132
314/991-4220

Random House
201 East 50th Street
New York, NY 10022
212/572-2616

Scholastic Inc.
2931 East McCarty Street
P.O. Box 5702
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Sierra On-Line
Sierra On-Line Building
Coarsegold, CA 93614
209/683-6858

SRA/SCI Research Associates
155 North Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606
800/621-0476

Steele Publishing
PO Box 5493
Concord, CA 94524
415/685-7265

Sunburst Communications
39 Washington Avenue
Pleasantville, NY 10570-9971
800/431-1934

Writing Software International
110 East Broadway
Suite 600
Missoula, MT 59802
406/543-3141

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Dr. Robert R. Rath, Executive Director

Dr. Ethel Simon-McWilliams, Associate Director

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Daro Weital
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Federated States of Micronesia

Doyle E. Winter (Vice Chairman)
Superintendent
Educational Service District 121
Seattle, Washington

Alaska Offices
Goldstein Building, Room 506
130 Seward Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801
(907) 586-4952

650 W. International Airport Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99502
(907) 563-3174

NWREL Headquarters
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204
(503) 275-9500
SOURCE STL058

Pacific Region Office
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1409
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
(808) 533-1748

Rocky Mountain Office
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 320
Denver, Colorado 80295
(303) 830-3675